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News Release



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For Immediate Release

Fish and Wildlife Service to hold public information meeting on proposed snowy plover conservation rule *Innovative strategy under ESA to encourage local conservation efforts*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold an informal meeting in Coos Bay to discuss its proposed rule promoting conservation of the western snowy plover. The meeting will be held in the Coos Bay public library at 525 Anderson Ave., Coos Bay, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 6. A public comment period on the proposal remains open until June 20.

Previously, the agency announced a finding that the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover remains at risk from habitat loss, human disturbances and other perils and would retain its status as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

In completing its in-depth review of the status of the bird, the Service found significant progress has been made toward bringing the species back to health, and proposed a new rule that would support and enhance local conservation efforts. The rule – known as a “special rule” under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act – would allow some incidental loss, or “take,” of western snowy plovers within counties that meet Breeding Bird Management Goals as specified in the final recovery plan for the western snowy plover (which is expected to be completed later this year).

The special rule is intended to increase support for western snowy plover recovery; provide an incentive to counties to develop management plans to meet recovery goals; and enable the Service to focus limited staff and financial resources in those counties where the recovery need is greatest.

The agency is seeking specific information and comment from all sources on the following questions:

1. What types of beach activities should be addressed in this rule?
2. Is the achievement of “Breeding Bird Management Goals” for each county an appropriate measure?
3. What kinds of monitoring and reporting would ensure that goals are met?
4. Should wintering habitat be taken into account in this rule? If so, how it should be addressed?
5. At what level of jurisdiction (i.e., county, state) should such a special rule be proposed?
6. Should the Service provide consideration for individual landowners? If so, how?
7. How should areas without breeding bird goals identified in the Draft Recovery Plan but which are important for wintering plovers be addressed, such as the Siuslaw River South Jetty to Siltcoos?

8. Is it appropriate to use two out of the previous five years, as proposed in the draft rule, to assess whether a county has met its Breeding Bird Management Goals?

Comments, information and suggestions regarding the proposal may be sent to the Field Supervisor (Attn: WSP-4d), Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1655 Heindon Road, Arcata, California 95521 or by fax at 707-822-8411.

The western population of the tiny shorebird that breeds in coastal areas in California, Oregon and Washington has been listed as threatened since 1993. The current population estimate for the U.S. portion of the Pacific Coast population is approximately 2,300, based on a 2005 survey. The largest number of breeding birds occurs south of San Francisco Bay to southern Baja. It is classified as a “distinct population segment” under the ESA, separate from populations that nest in inland areas from Nevada and Utah to Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

The western snowy plover is distinguished from other plovers by its small size, pale brown upper parts, dark patches on either side of the upper breast, and dark gray to blackish legs. Snowy plovers weigh between 1.2 and two ounces. They are generally five to seven inches long. The Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover breeds primarily on coastal beaches from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The decline of the species has been attributed to loss of nesting habitat, human disturbance, encroachment of European beach grass on nesting grounds, and predation. The species was listed as threatened in 1993, and the Service designated critical habitat in 2005.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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